

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 5363

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINS MILI VS

SUBJECT: MR 1 AT X PLUS 60 - THE MILITARY SITUATION

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SAIGON FROM DANANG APRIL 1, 1973 RPTD FOR
YOUR INFO

QUOTE DANANG 308

1. THIS IS THE FIRST OF THREE REPORTS SUMMARIZING THE
SITUATION IN MILITARY REGION I AS OF THE END OF THE
FIRST SIXTY DAYS OF CEASEFIRE IN VIETNAM. PART TWO
DEALS WITH THE ICCS. PART THREE COVERS POLITICAL
AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS. THESE REPORTS ARE
IN LIEU OF OUR WEEKLY CEASEFIRE OVERVIEW FOR THE PERIOD
MARCH 25-31, 1973

2. THE FIRST 60 DAYS OF CEASEFIRE HAVE SEEN THE LEVEL
OF MILITARY ACTIVITY DROP RADICALLY COMPARED TO THE
PRE- CEASEFIRE PERIOD. THIS DROP IS REFLECTED IN ALL
COMBAT STATISTICS REPORTED THROUGH GVN CHANNELS. THE
MAIN LINES OF BATTLE, WHERE THEY CAN BE IDENTIFIED,
REMAIN VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL TO THOSE EXISTING ON X DAY.
NEITHER SIDE HAS FOUND IT POSSIBLE TO ADD SIGNIFICANTLY
TO ITS CONTROL OF EITHER TERRITORY OR POPULATION
THROUGH MILITARY ACTIVITY. WHERE A SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGE
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HAS BEEN GAINED, IT HAS BEEN IN TERMS OF ENEMY FORCES
DESTROYED (AS IN THE CASE OF SOUTHERN QUANG NGAI, WHERE

THE NVA 2 ND DIV WAS MAULED DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF CEASEFIRE) RATHER THAN TERRAIN. IN CONTESTED AREAS WHERE BATTLELINES ARE VAGUE THE GVN HAS ENCROACHED SOMEWHAT UPON TERRITORY CONSIDERED PREDOMINANTLY UNDER COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN RECENT YEARS. FOR THE MOST PART, HOWEVER, THERE HAS BEEN REMARKABLY LITTLE CHANGE IN THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF COMMUNISTS AND GVN FORCES SINCE X DAY.

3. IN QUANG TRI THE COMMUNISTS APPEAR TO HAVE SETTLED , AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, FOR BATTLELINES AS THEY PRESENTLY EXIST. ACTIVITY HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NIL THERE FOR TWO WEEKS. ELEMENTS OF AT LEAST SIX NVA DISISIONS, PLUS SIZEABLE SUPPORT UNITS, REMAIN IN THE AOS OF THE MARINE AND AIRBORNE DIVISIONS. THE ARVN 1 ST DIV OPPOSES ONE NVA DIV AND TWO INDEPENDENT REGIMENTS IN THE MOUNTAINS WEST OF HUE. NVA PROBES TO PENETRATE THE LOWLANDS BETWEEN HUE AND THE QUANG TRI BORDER HAVE SUBSIDED BUT THE THREAT REMAINS; SIMILARLY, EFFORTS TO INTERDICT QL 1 SOUTHEAST OF HUE HAVE NOT BEEN PRESSED FOR SIX WEEKS. NVA UNITS EXERT CONSTANT PRESSURE ACROSS THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE 1 ST DIV LINE PARTICULARLY IN THE BASTOGNE, KIM QUY AND VEGHEL AREA SOUTHWEST OF HUE. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ENEMY IN THUA THIEN IS NOT YET CONTENT WITH HIS PRESENT FIELD POSITIONS.

4. ALTHOUGH BOTH NORTHERN AND WESTERN FRONTS IN THE REGION' S TWO NORTHERNMOST PROVINCES CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS RELATIVELY QUIESCENT, THE OVERALL MILITARY PICTURE THERE GIVES LITTLE CAUSE FOR OPTIMISM ON THE LONG TERM. THERE HAS BEEN AN ACCELERATED RATE OF ROAD BUILDING, RESUPPLY, VEHICULAR AND ARMOR MOVEMENT, AAA EMPLACEMENT -- IN SUM, A GENERAL STRENGTHENING OF THE MILITARY SUPPORT STRUCTURE -- IN COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED ZONES OF QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN. MISSILE SITES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT AT LEAST TWO AIRFIELDS COULD ACCEPT PROPELLER AIR- CRAFT AND HELICOPTERS ON SHORT NOTICE. BASE AREA 114 (AT THE EAST MOUGH OF THE BA LONG - DA KRONG VALLEYS), POINTING AT HUE, IS ONCE AGAIN THE SCENE OF FORWARD BUILDUP. ALTHOUGH ARTILLERY FIRE HAS BEEN RARE IN RECENT WEEKS, CONFIDENTIAL

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THERE ARE AMPLE REPORTS OF RESUPPLY AND PREPARATORY ACTIVITY REMINISCENT OF FEBRUARY- MARCH 1972. PARTICULARLY IN HIS ACTIVITY WEST OF HUE, THE ENEMY IS ATTEMPTING TO MOVE TO A MORE ADVANTAGEOUS STANCE. IN SUM, THE LULL AT X PLUS 60 I QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN DOES NOT REPRESENT A GENUINE RESOLUTION OF THE MILITARY CONTEST FOR NORTHERN MR I. ON THE CONTRARY, THERE ARE UNMISTAKABLE SIGNS OF AN INCREASED ENEMY CAPABILITY FOR LARGE SCALE OPERATIONS.

5. IN THE REGION' S THREE SOUTHERN PROVINCES, THE GVN' S POSITION AT X PLUS 60 IS PERHAPS SLIGHTLY IMPROVED OVER THAT OF X DAY. THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF CEASEFIRE SAW BITTER FIGHTING IN SOUTHERN QUNAG NGAI WITH THE ARVN 2 ND DIV FINALLY RECAPTURING THE STRATEGIC SA HUYNH AREA, WHICH HAD FALLEN TO THE NVA 2 ND DIV AT X PLUS 1. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF BA TO, WHICH CAME UNDER NVA CONTROL AROUND X DAY, THE GVN CONTROLS ALL MOUNTAIN DISTRICT TOWNS IN ITS POSSESSION AT THE TIME OF CEASEFIRE. THERE HAVE BEEN MODEST ATTEMPTS TO EXTEND OR SOLIDIFY GVN PRESENCE IN THE BATANGAN PENINSULA AND IN THE PIEDMONT WEST OF TAM KY. IN THE QUE SON VALLEY, ARVN AND NVA FORCES ARE PRESENTLY STALEMATED; ABFS, SNIPING, AND SPORADIC GROUND CONTACTS CONTINUE AT THE WESTERN AND WOUTHERN EDGES OF THE VALLEY. IN THE LOC HIEP - ARIZONA TERRITORY - GO NOI ISLAND AREA OF QUANG NAM, THE GVN HAS MADE A CONCERTED EFFORT SINCE CEASEFIRE TO MOP UP RESIDENT VC LOCAL FORCE UNITS AND TO IMPLANT A VERIFIABLE GOVERNMENT PRESENCE INTO AN AREA WHICH HAS BEEN BITTERLY FOUGHT OVER IN RECENT YEARS.

6. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT RELATIVELY LIMITED MILITARY ACTION WILL CONTINUE IN THESE AREAS, OCCASIONALLY FLARING INTO MAJOR VIOLENCE, REGARDLESS WHETHER OR NOT A MAJOR NVA OFFENSIVE IS LAUNCHED COUNTRYWIDE. NEITHER SIDE IS COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH THE SITUATION AS IT EXISTS IN CENTRAL QUANG NAM, THE QUE SON VALLEY, OR IN SEVERAL QUANG NGAI DISTRICTS. JOCKEYING WILL CONTINUE. THE COMMUNISTS HAVE MADE NO SECRET OF THEIR INTENTION TO TRY AGAIN IN THE SA HUYNH AREA, WHILE THE GVN IS EQUALLY DETERMINED TO ASSERT ITSELF IN OTHER AREAS IT CONSIDERS ESSENTIAL. AS IN THE NORTHERN TWO PROVINCES, THESE EVENTS ARE TAKING PLACE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF COMMUNIST
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MILITARY PREPARATIONS IN THE PIEDMONT AND WESTERN MOUNTAIN AREAS.

7. IN OUR OPINION, THERE HAS BEEN A GENUINE ATTEMPT ON THE PART OF THE I CORPS COMMANDER, LTG NGO QUANG TRUONG, TO FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES SET FORTH BY PRESIDENT THIEU WITH REGARD TO LIMITING RVNAF OFFENSIVE MILITARY OPERATIONS. ONCE SA HUYNH WAS REGAINED AND SOUTHERN QUANG NGAI BROUGHT BACK UNDER GVN CONTROL, THERE HAVE BEEN NO MAJOR GVN INITIATIVES. FRIENDLY ARTILLERY FIRES, WHICH WERE AT THE 30,000 ROUNDS PER DAY LEVEL THROUGH THE INITIAL WEEKS OF CEASEFIRE, HAVE DROPPED TO LESS THAN ONE THOUSAND. AIR STRIKES HAVE BEEN DRASTICALLY CURBED. ALTHOUGH VNAF FLIES UP TO 18 RECONNAISSANCE SORTIES DAILY OVER THE MOUNTAIN AREAS, THERE HAVE (TO OUR KNOWLEDGE) BEEN NO STRIKES AGAINST THE COMMUNIST BUILDUP THERE OR ANY

OTHER ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE WITH A DEVELOPING THREAT
WHICH CAN ONLY BE CAUSING GRAVE CONCERN TO GENERAL TRUONG
AND HIS STAFF. IN THIS SENSE, A CEASEFIRE OF SORTS IN
MR I HAS COME ABOUT. THE REAL QUESTIONS, HOWEVER, REMAIN
-- HOW LONG WILL THE DRV/ PRG BE CONTENT WITH THE STATUS
QUO AND WHAT FORM WILL THEIR NEXT ATTEMPTS TO MOVE INTO
THE POPULATED LOWLANDS TAKE?
THOMSEN
UNQUOTE
BENNETT

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